

in real time. The card balance ultimately controls the point at which the system halts all further expenditures using that card. The system could inform the controller in anticipation of the depletion such that a new account may be specified. In the preferred embodiment, the depleted account may be used as a prototype that can be copied for a new cash equivalent card for a limited amount of time before the code administrative function is disabled for that cash equivalent card account on the cash equivalent server. This control functionality may be additionally be used by existing credit card companies to allow credit card customers to allow customers to manage personal, family, and business spending throughout the year where the billing periods defined may correspond to either calendar periods, billing periods, or pay periods as the user defines them to effectively control a budget at the point of sale.

The destination user may be given access to the administrative form to review the inputs made by the controller. The user may place further restrictions on their own spending to decrease the available limit for a particular category. This type of modification may permit the user to reallocate potential savings into other categories if permitted by the controller. Access and control may be shared by selecting check boxes on the interface. Other limits may be specified using rules to implement either notification of events or to limit spending or to reallocate spending. For example the controller create multiple PINs 360 that may be used during the point of sale transaction to cause different rules to be enforced. The access profile parameter 350 may give the PIN 360 different levels of authorization to change or modify values in the table. The destination user would not see this

5 screen but would instead be able to access a different form where the user would only see or be able to control those items that correspond to the account and PIN that have been granted either view, modify, or reallocate privileges. These are sample control fields to demonstrate the functionality of the system, other controls and access capabilities may be implemented to extend the functions to include geographic restrictions, time of day or other restrictions.

10 It is also a function of this invention that different users may use the control system of this invention where at the point of sale a code or PIN may be entered to allow the user to have access to different purchasing options. For example, the controller of the card may be able to allocate different purchasing options to different users of one credit card or cash equivalent card. The user may be required to enter a PIN at the point of sale to access higher levels of authorized or allowed spending in different categories.

15 The cash equivalent cards and the control aspects of the present invention may therefore be used by payment instrument companies such as VISA, MasterCard, and American Express where the existing authorization system is expanded to provide the additional functionality described to allow the cash equivalent card and budget control process to be seamlessly used throughout the world. Indeed, one embodiment could perform these functions for travelers checks or other cash equivalent instruments which are or could be encoded with unique instrument bank routing and transit numbers or other indicia which can be verified and communicated in a variety of telephonic, electronic, digital or other communications means.

Incentives and rebates may additionally be supported in this system where the cash equivalent server may track transactions recorded related to a card to provide purchasing incentives to the user such as, to buy more of a particular product, to visit merchant locations, to purchase other products or to increase the usage of the cash equivalent card. Frequent purchases of movie tickets for example, may cause the cardholder to periodically receive free admission at a particular location upon presentation of the card. Contests or sweepstakes may additionally be offered through use of the cash equivalent card where the contest is made available by a merchant through the cash equivalent server or from an offer made by the cash equivalent server directly. The cardholder may be informed that they have won the contest or sweepstakes when the cash equivalent server is contacted from a point of sale. Rebates may optionally be redeemed at the point of sale. Incentives may also be provided by other than merchant companies via the cash equivalent server. For example, industry trade groups may provide rebates or coupon-like returns on purchases of products belonging to particular trade categories such that a purchase using the card at any one of a number of dairy related companies may be afforded an incentive at the point of purchase. The incentive is applied to the final price that was submitted to the cash equivalent server with the cardholder receiving the benefit of the lower price deducted from their cash equivalent card balance and the merchant receiving the full payment from the cash equivalent server with the trade group making up the difference. These type of incentives may be flagged based on the product type or the merchant category, where the cash equivalent server looks in memory for applicable incentives

Page 15  
Page 20  
Page 24

as part of a data processing step following reception at the cash equivalent server.

5 In another embodiment, for cards that have been purchased and not used, the cash equivalent server may provide incremental value or other incentives if the card is not used or where the card available balance is increased periodically based on specified parameters of criteria.

10 The system of the present invention may additionally provide points or other usage tracking means to the card based on purchases made. The points are recorded against the cash equivalent card record in the database. The cardholder may access the cash equivalent card information to review points awarded.

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